

Senator Abrams, Representative Steinberg, ranking members Hwang, Somers and Petit and distinguished members of the Public Health Committee:

My name is Christine Dokko. I am from Guilford. I am testifying in favor of the language in HB-5397, An Act Declaring Gun Violence a Public Health Crisis and Establishing the Office of Gun Violence Prevention, because it incorporates five important components that should be present in whichever bill is voted out of your committee:

- It declares gun violence a public health crisis.
- It houses the solution in the Department of Public Health where it can have the greatest impact.
- It has mechanisms to include voices of those most impacted by community gun violence.
- It includes a robust data gathering and research capacity to drive evidence-informed grant-making.
- It calls for funding commensurate with the magnitude of the crisis.

Because of its scale as the leading cause of premature death in the U.S. and the ripple effect it has on the health of relatives of victims and witnesses to violence, gun violence should be thought of as a public health crisis as well as a criminal justice issue. Approaching it this way lets us apply preventative tools that have been effective in reducing deaths from tobacco use and car accidents and are being put to use in the opioid crisis.

Getting gun violence under control in cities is a moral issue, considering the vast racial disparities in the chances of being killed by gun violence. More than half of the state's gun homicide victims are black, but only 10% of the state's population is Black. Young Black men in Connecticut are almost 39 times more likely to be killed by a gun than similarly aged white men. Even more compelling to me as a mother is thinking of the routine exposure to gun violence that afflicts children in our cities. This childhood trauma is linked to lifelong consequences including chronic health problems, mental illness, substance abuse, increased likelihood of criminal behavior, forming healthy relationships and having stable employment.

With the spike in gun violence leading to the highest number of gun homicides in 25 years last year, we need to act aggressively and effectively in preventing more deaths.

Thank you for hearing my testimony.

Sincerely,

Christine Dokko

Guilford, CT